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Viewing cable 05ALMATY13, KAZAKHSTAN: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH OTAN PARTY

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05ALMATY13	2005-01-04 05:25	2011-08-30 01:44	UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY	US Office Almaty

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UNCLAS ALMATY 000013

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KZ](#) [POLITICAL](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH OTAN PARTY

LEADER YERMEGIYAYEV

REF: A) ALMATY 4769 B) ALMATY 4315 C) ALMATY 4274

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During a December 21 introductory meeting with the Ambassador, pro-presidential Otan Party deputy chair Armangeldy Yermegiyayev described a party with a strong vertical structure, an extensive local network, and a clear platform. He outlined a vision of quality-of-life improvements coupled with gradual democratic change. Yermegiyayev assessed the work of U.S.-funded democracy NGOs positively, reserving his criticism for opposition parties Ak Zhol and Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan and, somewhat surprisingly, first daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva's Asar. End summary.

¶2. (U) The Ambassador met with pro-presidential Otan Party deputy chair Armangeldy Yermegiyayev on December 21 at Otan's party headquarters in Almaty, the site of the November 28 explosions (ref A). Party official Kazbek Kazkenov also took part in the meeting. Since the October resignation of Zharmakhan Tuyakbay (ref B), one of the other two deputy chairs, Yermegiyayev has been the day-to-day leader of Otan. Aleksandr Pavlov, the third deputy chairman, maintains a much lower profile than either of his counterparts. President Nazarbayev is the chairman.

Membership Growing "Voluntarily"

¶3. (SBU) Yermegiyayev informed the Ambassador that Otan's membership had increased to 450,000, taking pains to note that members joined voluntarily out of a personal choice to support the party's ideology. He added that the party had instituted monthly dues, ranging from 5 KZT to 50 KZT (\$.04

to \$.38) according to income, specifically to prevent mass enrollments at institutions. The party leader said that Otan has 9,100 party organizations at the primary level (i.e. institutions), an office staffed by two professional staff members in each raion (subdivision of an oblast), and an office staff by five professional staff members in each oblast. Yermegiyayev explained that oblast party leaders are selected locally and then approved by the national organization, to maintain the party's strict vertical structure.

14. (SBU) With the formation of the new Mazhilis and the adherence of several independent candidates to Otan, the party now holds 53 of the 77 seats in the lower house. (Note: Mazhilis speaker Uraz Mukhamedzhanov and deputy speaker Sergey Dyachenko, although Otan members, do not count as part of the party bloc. End note.) Yermegiyayev remarked that political parties do not have offices or staff in the Parliament, as they do in the Russian Duma, implying that this was a shortcoming of the system. He said that Otan favored a greater role for parties and had "posed the question."

Otan Platform "Does Not Always Match Government Policy"

15. (SBU) At the party's 7th congress, in early December, members had agreed on a number of changes to the party platform; according to Yermegiyayev, the new 2004-2009 program would essentially be the party's presidential campaign platform. He insisted that the party's views do not always match the government's policies, claiming that President Nazarbayev makes a clear distinction between his role as head of state and his job as party chairman. To support his argument, he cited Otan's long-standing proposal to increase the Mazhilis from 77 to 120 seats, with half elected from party lists and half in single-member districts. He described this as a way to make the situation fairer for smaller parties. Yermegiyayev also underscored his vision for Otan as a party of ideas, not of one person, that would outlast the current government.

16. (SBU) Other elements of Otan's platform, according to Yermegiyayev, include giving parliament more control over the implementation of the national budget; equalizing the power of local elected bodies (maslikhats) with local executive authorities; giving maslikhat secretaries the right to run sessions on a continuous basis; and instituting the direct election of local leaders, with indirect election of raion leaders via the maslikhats. Yermegiyayev stressed that it would be "dangerous" to change the current practice of presidential appointment of

oblast leaders, given the balance of ethnic majorities in different parts of the country. He noted Russia's recent decision to do away with the election of governors as a relevant precedent. Yermegiyayev said that Otan was carefully considering the question of the formation of the government; at its next congress, the party might propose that the parliamentary majority should select all the ministers and form the government.

Ambitious Goals for Quality of Life

17. (SBU) Without going into detail as to how Otan would accomplish its objectives, Yermegiyayev outlined a range of ambitious goals to improve the quality of life of the average citizen. By 2009, pensions should equal 50% to 60% of the average wage; the current figure is approximately 28%. Salaries of teachers and doctors should be doubled. GDP per capita should double to \$4000. Spending on science should be raised from the current .16% to 1% of the budget. The government should institute a pro-natal policy with the goal of increasing the population to 20 million from its current level of 15 million. The industrial base should be diversified.

Good Cooperation with U.S.-Funded NGOs

18. (SBU) Given the GOK's recent allegations that U.S.-funded democracy NGOs concentrated a disproportionate amount of their efforts on the opposition (ref C), the Ambassador asked Yermegiyayev about Otan's cooperation with the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). Yermegiyayev and Kazkenov indicated that the party enjoyed good relations with both organizations, as well as with USAID. Kazkenov mentioned a recent IRI training program for young party members as an example of successful cooperation, noting that Otan had proposed organizing joint events open to all

parties in oblast capitals to both NDI and IRI.

Opposition Politicians "Only Desire Power"

¶ 9. (SBU) Turning to the Kazakhstani political opposition, Yermegiyayev's voice began to rise as he underscored what he described as the inherently hypocritical position of parties such as Ak Zhol and Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK). He asked rhetorically what ideology could possibly unite the ultra-liberal DCK with the Communists, who had formed a voting bloc for the parliamentary elections. "Only the desire for power," he claimed. Noting that before becoming leader of Otan he himself had been a private businessman, Yermegiyayev pointed out that opposition leaders such as Zhandosov, Sarsenbayev, and Kazhegeldin had been in the government at the time of flawed privatizations and had "created this problem with corruption." He claimed that they had all benefited personally from crooked privatization deals and had fought viciously over the booty. Yermegiyayev also singled out Zhandosov's call for the National Fund to be distributed directly to the people as a shockingly disingenuous populist move for a former Finance Minister. Yermegiyayev reminded the Ambassador that Ak Zhol had also called for the reexamination of contracts signed with foreign investors in the early 1990s, and stressed that Otan understood the need to respect contracts.

Asar: Not Clear What They Stand For

¶ 10. (SBU) Yermegiyayev told the Ambassador that the leadership of first daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva's Asar party had approached Otan before the parliamentary elections with a proposal to form a voting bloc. Otan had refused. Yermegiyayev described his party's attitude toward Asar as mixed; while they did not view Asar as a serious competitor, they needed time to see what the other main pro-presidential party stood for. He contrasted the two parties' programs, claiming that Otan had made very specific proposals while Asar had made only vague statements such as support for raising pensions and more support for science. Yermegiyayev remarked that time would

show which party had a real program and represented the interests of the people. (Comment: While Yermegiyayev may well have genuine antipathy toward Asar, many observers believe that the parties are deliberately trying to distance themselves from each other in order to appeal to different groups of voters and increase their overall vote share. End comment.)

¶ 11. (SBU) Bio note: Yermegiyayev was chairman of Otan from 2002 to March 2004, when he stepped down and became a deputy chair at the 6th Otan party congress. He is thought to be close to President Nazarbayev, as the latter chose him to be chairman of Otan even though Yermegiyayev had no history as a party activist. His demotion was seen by some local analysts as part of a Nazarbayev strategy to mobilize the rank and file; Yermegiyayev was thought to be too much of a functionary to carry out that role. (Note: Tuyakbay's subsequent resignation likely upset the overall strategy, however.) Yermegiyayev, one of eight children, was born June 14, 1944 in the village of Jalash in Alma-Ata Oblast. He graduated from Moscow's V. Kuybyshev Civil Engineering Institute in 1968 with a degree in industrial and civil construction. After military service, he worked in the construction industry until 1988, when he was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Almaty City Soviet of People's Deputies. He returned to the private sector in 1990 as president of the Almatykurylys construction holding company, a position he still holds.

¶ 12. (U) Dushanbe minimize considered.

ASQUINO